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ENGLAND

BY

B. M. G.-ADAMS



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I. *The Obsequies.*

THE WIND BLEW sheets of rain along the platform.

The car was waiting. Of imposing size, with a good deal of glass, a nickel plated vase that had never held flowers, an unused timepiece, it had been purchased from an income most of which had found its way annually into the pockets of bookmakers. On the right hand side of the wide inside seat, the fawn corduroy cushions were pressed down into a flattened hollow, as though from some heavy, perpetual weight. Two years' dropsy had preceded the heart failure.

Wheels swished through puddles in the neglected drive, a lake was forming on the gravel sweep in front of the Priory. Above the door, the family arms on a dingy hatchment were being newly varnished by the damp. Over the peach-like bloom of the wet grass, a string of ducks, quacking mournfully, proceeded in the direction of the monk's fish-ponds.

In the low raftered hall the deaf mute sat beside a hissing acrid smoking wood fire, scarcely visible, apathetic, red-eyed, holding a shivering griffon on her knees.

Millicent passed. The cleanly starched nurse, tired, but with thinly firm lips, wafted an atmosphere of disinfectant as she leant across the library tea-table to help herself to more cake. Stout, flushed, with untidy iron-gray hair, Mrs. Merton in black voile blouse and a skirt too tight for her fifty-five years, held a steaming tumbler of whisky and soda, and was unrecognisable as the original of the photograph of a pretty girl in a sailor jumper, in a tarnished silver frame on the writing table.

The family solicitor had not arrived, and for the first time in thirty years entire authority of decision rested with her. It had taken nearly forty-eight hours for

this idea to penetrate. Her unstable arrangements for the funeral had to be placed before Mr. Filey. She did not miss her husband. They had quarrelled noisily and perpetually, and had disliked being away from each other. She still possessed the well formed legs and ankles which had originally attracted Mr. Merton, and to the end he was proud of them as against all competition from younger women. He held himself no poor judge. His son returning six weeks later, found foreign postcards by the dozen, which justified this claim.

The new mistress of the Priory had not yet recovered from the shock of Saturday's telegram. She began to cry as she kissed her mother-in-law, who said, "Dear, dear Millicent, you really ought not to have come."

The air on the staircase was heavy with the semi-darkness of two days' drawn blinds, the wide landing outside the locked door scarcely lit by a night-light on a chair. Shadows swayed with the splash of rain. Through the baize door ajar at the top of the back stairs, faintly came the rattle of crockery and an echo of laughter, from the servants' quarters. A song which the gramophone had ground out night after night in the hall, her previous visit, rang persistently in the daughter-in-law's head:

Every evening I am seen
Walking with my Angeline,
She's the girl I i-do-lize,
For she's got such dreamy eyes.

She heard the nurse say: "You would like to see him for your husband's sake. I think if you feel up to it, you had better do so to-day. You see he died early Saturday morning, and in these cases it is always advisable to screw down the coffin early." She added that Mrs. Merton had been very difficult after the death, she had refused to allow the body to be touched for some hours, there had been a great deal of trouble in bandaging the knees down, and getting things done.

Everything considered, he really looked very well now.

There were daffodils and narcissi on the dressing table and on the mantelpiece among photograph frames; arum lilies and three small bunches of violets on the sheet which covered the rigid outline on the wide brass bed. The persistent odour of burning cresoline caught her nostrils and throat. The candles smouldered in china candle-sticks. The nurse lit the gas and blew out the candles.

She turned the sheet back. The heavy face with stubby moustache had gained in dignity. It struck Millicent that it had a remote resemblance to her baby son. A sudden pity for the being kept thus behind a locked door smote on her. She bent down and kissed the swollen forehead; realising shiveringly by its chill, the sentimental futility of her act.

Mr. Filey arrived at nine-thirty. Remembering swift and untrustworthy variations in the Priory cooking, he had decided to dine in town, and charge it to travelling expenses. Bald, kindly, forty-five, patient, except when suffering as at present from a slight indigestion, he unwound a wool comforter, and as a caterpillar emerging from its cocoon, disembarrassed himself from two travelling coats. He replaced in his attaché case a paper backed edition of "His Excellency the Governor," with which he had been struggling during the last hour of his journey. In it the part of the Colonial Secretary had been heavily underscored. He knew that he would look the role, but that dignity of bearing, even on the amateur stage, could not atone for more than a certain number of lapses of memory. He was missing two rehearsals at least through his present visit. Saturday—Monday—Wednesday—if the funeral were to take place on Wednesday.

Later in the evening it became obvious that the funeral would not take place on Wednesday. Mrs.

Merton had not made up her mind whether to deposit Henry in Holiwell Churchyard, where many of the Mertons had been buried, or the family vault at Saffron-le-Change, eleven miles distant. Whichever it was, it involved her future burying place. Saffron-le-Change would mean delay, application would have to be made to, and permission received from the Home Office, before the vault, closed some years previously, could be reopened. Mr. Filey urged Holiwell. The vault was full—was known to be full—had been closed because it was full. Mrs. Merton left the library to stop the whimpering of her youngest son's fox terrier tied on the landing. The nurse abruptly insisted on the necessity for a leaden shell within the next twenty-four hours, whatever was decided upon.

Against this unnecessary expenditure, of no interest from the point of view of his firm, Mr. Filey took a resolute stand, on the grounds of extravagance. Moreover, the flower of England's manhood was in khaki and all lead was needed for other and more important purposes. His opponent went into details with the accuracy which had secured her recommendation from the Cavendish Square specialist, and rising to her feet expressed her willingness to conduct him to the death chamber, so that he might there judge for himself. Mr. Filey said he would take her word for it, and she might telephone to the undertaker the next morning as soon as the establishment was open.

By the next day the odour of cresoline had passed through the locked door. One noticed it on the landing. A white mist lay over the grounds, a shroud through which no noise from the outer world could penetrate. Silence, broken only by a sudden outburst of voices in which Mrs. Merton's dominated, or by a strange female, with clinking pail and crushed bonnet, who was scrubbing down interminable back stairs and stone passages.

A stylish young woman in black, from Palmer and Yarvell, the principal ladies' outfitters in Casterham, occupied the dusty little boudoir during part of the morning. Sipping sherry and crumbling seed-cake, as she fitted the maidservants with ready-made mourning, and measured Mrs. Merton and her deaf daughter. On her knees, amidst scattered pins and back numbers of the Delineator, she advocated a skirt ten inches off the ground and five yards round the hem, as the last number of Vogue showed that they were wearing in Paris. Millicent escaped to the library, and found "The Garden of the Soul" strangely comfortless. Mr. Filey had taken charge of the dead man's keys, and was going through the contents of the writing table.

"I suppose Mrs. Merton will not alter her mind again regarding Thursday? . . . It is absolutely necessary for me to be back in the office by Friday morning at latest You must find it very monotonous here with this detestable weather You are looking a little depressed to-day I wish I could take you to a cinema."

The smell of cresoline descended from the landing.

Afternoon brought the vicar, prepared to re-arrange his engagements round the date and hour of the funeral. He was worried at not having been called to the bedside. An Italian iron crucifix on a side table in the library, had for many months encouraged him to believe that something might have been done professionally for the late squire, had a favorable opportunity arisen for touching on such matters. It had not. He expressed his willingness to hold a special celebration of holy communion for the bereaved household at eight o'clock on the following morning, and suggested that any guests staying under the Priory roof should also be invited to attend. Mrs. Merton had been interrupted in the midst of voluble reminiscences. The

milliner had brought up an assortment of widow's bonnets on approval, from Palmer and Yarvel. She said that there was so much to be done between then and Thursday, that she was afraid that no one from the Priory would have time to go. Her husband had always been the best of men, truly religious, though he had not had as much time as some other people for thinking about spiritual things. The Vicar left before sherry and seed cake arrived.

A leaden shell was delivered at eight that evening. Little light glinted from badly cleaned silver and tarnished frames of indifferent family portraits in the dining room. It had caught something of the atmosphere of the room above, across whose floor heavy footsteps were heard moving to and fro, punctuated by lighter quicker ones of the nurse. Some hours previously a fire had been lit up there, to heat the requisites for soldering the lead. There was an unpleasant ringing in the daughter-in-law's ears—Mr. Filey as he pushed away his cutlet and drained his second glass of wine, faded momentarily from her vision, then reappeared again. The deaf mute, conscious of something amiss, stopped eating. Her anxious eyes moved from Millicent's to the solicitor's face. Mrs. Merton helped herself for the second time to mashed potatoes. The chink of the spoon and a further creaking overhead occurred almost simultaneously. The daughter-in-law again found the room filled with mist.

"It is outrageous," said Mrs. Merton, suddenly, a piece of mutton poised on her fork, "that Ford should send his men at this hour. Nurse's dinner will be cold. What is the matter with your cutlet, Millicent? Don't you like them? Well, well, Mr. Filey, it's what must come to all of us, when all's said and done. Only sixty-three. Still, one might say, quite a young man."

Light and time surged together for Millicent and

disappeared. Later she realised that she was lying on the hall sofa. The nurse was rubbing her feet. The local doctor stood between lamp and fire, putting a hypodermic syringe into its case.

"People who are invalids have no business to turn up uninvited in other people's houses, and collapse on their hands at a time like this," remarked Mrs. Merton's voice with justice, from somewhere near the stairs. "Had you finished your dinner, Doctor, when nurse telephoned? Are you sure you won't have some ham and a glass of claret?"

The funeral was to leave the Priory at two-twenty on Thursday. Question of reopening the Saffron-le-Change vault had been waived, but the interment was to take place there in the churchyard. Colour and scent splashed into the hall all day Wednesday. Wreath after wreath arrived, and the shining elm box in the upstairs room was almost wholly hidden beneath tube-rose, violets, gardenias and lilac. The car took Millicent to the florists in Casterham after lunch. The rain had stopped, a west wind was blowing, there were glimpses of blue between drifting spring clouds. She ordered a wreath of yellow tulips, instead of the cross of carnations and arum lilies that had seemed appropriate at an earlier hour.

Thursday morning the car travelled at irregular intervals, between the house and the station. John Merton, late of the Indian Civil, small, dapper, with grey moustache, bearing his sixty odd years with dignified precision, arrived earliest. He had come down overnight from the home he shared with a spinster sister in Northumberland. He had cordially disliked his late cousin. His feeling towards the widow was even more positive. But respect for his own family made it correct for him to attend the funeral of its head.

That the younger Mrs. Merton, whom he had not

previously met, was anemic looking, and had little conversational ability, was of small moment to him once he discovered that her voice and manner belonged to that social stratum from which the deceased, had he possessed a sense of what was due to those who bore his name, should have chosen his wife. The old man conducted her to the drawing room on the pretext of re-inspecting woolwork executed by his grandmother, there to impress her with the fact that now onwards she had the right to style herself "Mrs. Merton." "Charles" should be omitted from the visiting cards she would doubtless order on her return home. What the order of precedence at the funeral would be, so far as she and her sister-in-law were concerned, he could not tell her. But she must insist on her right to a seat in the first carriage behind the hearse. Millicent handed him over to Daniel Merton, naval lieutenant, who entered at that moment, bearing with bored decorum a floral cross and a jaeger travelling rug. She then went upstairs to tack a clean white collar into her black dress.

At one o'clock, eighteen people lunched in the dining-room. Mr. Filey and Ford the undertaker had difficulty in impressing Mrs. Merton with the unsuitability of presiding over the party in person. She insisted that her husband would have considered her absence a failure in hospitality. She also had to be reassured that etiquette presupposed her daughter-in-law too incapacitated by grief to make a public appearance until the arrival of the hearse, before consenting to cold salmon, veal pie and whisky and soda, on a tray in her boudoir at a quarter past one. The younger woman, agitated and neuralgic, ordered tea and biscuits in her room for the same hour. Two o'clock had struck before an apologetic housemaid appeared with black coffee, three éclairs and a macaroon.

A quarter past two. Millicent tied a veil over her

heavy crepe hat and slowly struggled with a new pair of suede gloves. Her knees shook a little. She glanced at her trunk which was packed and ready for departure that evening. Murmur of voices and hurrying footsteps on the landing, then an abrupt knock and summons for her. Half way downstairs the interior of the library was visible, filled with the lunchers talking and smoking. The dead man's felt slippers still lay beside the couch on which painted little Mrs. Heath, the doctor's wife, sat, her knees crossed, a cigarette between her lips. The old brown sherry for which the cellar was noted, had not made its appearance on the luncheon table, Mr. Ford having announced that white wine was the only kind permissible on these melancholy occasions. Sir William Burney, who had come down from town, counting on the excellent liquor the house usually offered as the one thing likely to make a distasteful day bearable, emerged to greet his daughter, coffee cup in hand, in a state of overfed irritability, expressing doubts as to whether his sciatica would after all permit his attendance at the church.

There was a sudden movement amongst servants grouped at the foot of the stairs. The drawing room opened and the shining elm box was borne through it on six men's shoulders. It was carried out under the Merton hatchment. The hall was crowded. Smouldering fire and the shabby pair of slippers in the library, showed suddenly deserted through the doorway up the first flight of stairs.

"Mr. Ford," said Mrs. Merton, who had acquired a tone of excessive formality with her swathings of crepe, "does Mrs. Charles accompany me, or go in the second carriage?"

"Your daughter only with you, Mrs. Merton," was the reply. "First carriage, Mr. and Miss Merton. Second carriage, Mrs. Charles Merton, Mr. John Mer-

ton, Lieutenant Merton; Mr. Filey. Third carriage—" The spring afternoon reeked of petrol as the enumerated scrambled according to precedence, into motor broughams, which then, cutting the damp gravel, moved slowly behind the hearse.

"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out—" The tolling bell had stopped, the bald-headed clergyman, clutching his flapping surplice, preceded, book in hand, the six staggering men with their flower-decked load, up the narrow pathway to the Roman porch. The dark church seemed full. "For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, seeing that it is past as a watch in the night—" Small boys in the choir eyed the black-robed figures in front pews curiously. The straw stuffed hassocks were uncomfortable to kneel on. Someone just behind was sucking a lozenge which smelt of eucalyptus. Sunlight fell through a saint's robe in a high window. It stained the white blossoms on the coffin with patches of red and blue.

"So also is the resurrection—" A general movement. Down the nave faces of old women peered at the mourners. Men shielded their silk hats as bodies jostled against them, and feet shuffled over the flagstones out into the churchyard.

Over earth piled high, the widow's veil fluttered. Beside her the deaf girl cried, with bowed head. The coffin handles clicked. There was a creaking and a straining of ropes. A handful of gravel rattled on the brass inscription plate. The crowd pressed closer to the grave's edge. The daughter-in-law abruptly turned her back to it. There was clean primrose light in the sky, as on Easter day five years before, when the Vicar had stopped her at the gate. "Miss Burney, Mr. Merton is choosing a new family burial plot. Forgive me for delaying you, but you will naturally now feel a personal interest in the matter of—"

“And the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us—”

“Over?” said Sir William. “Tell that fellow I’ll give him an extra half-crown if he can get to the station in time for the 5.18.”

II. *Spaldingham.*

RED TILES, FADED brick, frayed haystacks, corrugated iron. Turnip fields inland, marsh between village and sea. Dank Norman church, with mediæval brasses and inadequate congregation. And that winter, colossal flare of sunset over the fens, whilst the shoreward blowing wind nipped one to the bone. It was like gazing at a furnace through glass.

There were other afternoons when sea fog was thick through the village. The roods inland whose hollows were puddles, whose silence was only broken by drip from overhanging skeleton trees, or slow creaking of turnip-laden carts emerging from and vanishing again into the mist, were impossible: I took instead the cart track between filled dykes that ran across the marsh to the beach. I said to myself: "The sea says the same thing everywhere. It says the same thing everywhere. It is the pathway to the countries of desire."

Frowsy women from Poacher's Row went at low tide to gather mussels. One met them coming back, bent beneath dripping sack loads, their clinging skirts no less foul for being soaked by sea water. We passed as animals pass. When I could hear the roar of an incoming tide behind the grey veil I would skirt the beach for two or three miles, and return by the railway track, sitting on a stone to shake the powdered sand from my shoes before climbing the fence. When I could not hear what I had come for, I would go back through damp and darkness to find fire.

Chintz covers wrapped everything in Mrs. Jocelyn's drawing room. A monotony of brown vines bearing purple bunches under a glazed surface. Thin cups, tea too strong. Faded water-colour sketches of Italy. Her grandmother had been Italian. She nodded her palsied

head as she spoke, and showed her artificial teeth under a grey moustache. But she still had life left in her. She chip carved and potted bulbs in a cupboard. At the tea table sat the rector, Mr. Oldham, an old vulture in tweed knickerbocker suit, eating dry gingerbread slowly, speaking seldom. Years before they were supposed to have had an affair. She had separated from her husband, but nothing more had happened.

“The old man is getting too tiresome—he’s as deaf as a post now—say anything you like, my dear.” There was a smear of jam on the table-cloth. He was oblivious of her annoyance. Later he would walk down to the station and buy a racing paper before returning to his two rooms over the draper’s shop. The bankruptcy eighteen years before had not quenched his interest in the turf. He held as few services as possible, and was always just sober enough to keep the congregation from dislodging him. If the place caught me he would take my funeral service.

Opposite Mardon, the grocer’s, the Gladwyn’s white and green house lay back, shrined by elms. It was filled with the possessions of their dead. Miss Gladwyn chattered, and was nearly blind. There was an old wine coloured Aubusson carpet with floral border on her bedroom floor. In the drawing room a new red wilton pile, to show she kept abreast with the times. During the summer she and her brother gave garden parties. Girls with thick ankles covered by white cotton stockings, clergymen accompanied by flat-chested wives with draped hats, a few retired military men, many earnest women of uncertain age. They walked in little knots through the kitchen garden, looked into the stable, grouped themselves on wooden benches round the croquet lawns. In the dining room maidservants, flushed and excited, poured tea and coffee from urns. There were many plates of fancy cakes and triangular sand-

wiches, jugs of claret cup, glass saucers of raspberries masked in cream. In the evening a hunting for wraps, and everyone went away by pony cart or bicycle. Nothing had been talked about.

At the Hall it had been different. Women had come from the world snapshotted by a parasite press. They showed their knees and had tinted fingernails. The men smoked excellent cigarettes, moved easily and were impertinent. All the women laughed a great deal. They arrived in cars with maids and crocodile dressing cases; they spoke always of where they had been and were going on to. Their nakedness looked expensive at Whitworth's dinner table. Champagne lay in great bubbles of Venetian glass. Tea and rubber had done it. Then Whitworth died of some obscure liver complaint. Mrs. Whitworth went to Paris. She had always hated the place. This winter it was to let.

Cecily Austen said, "Come to tea, my old man is always glad to see you." She said, "He woke at two last night. I read the Life of Apollonius of Tyana to him until five. This is the third time this week. For God's sake, bring any shockers or illustrated papers you can raise. I'm sick of decent literature. I never want to read a line of it again." She was tall, with a thin face and big mouth. When one looked at it one thought, "My dear, why don't you say those witty things?" His daughters, older than she, had been her only friends at Carchester, where she had been companion to a dean's widow who died and left her an annuity of a hundred and twenty pounds. She left the Close, Canon Austen's reminiscences of Highgate in the sixties, and a Matthew Arnold study circle, to recommence life as an art student in Sydney Street, Chelsea.

There was one ecstatic summer of turpentine-stained overalls, studio jamborees, and little dinners at Canute's. Then the man went abroad. He did not write. In her

class work she saw reflected the ineffectuality of her upbringing. She was in debt to her landlady. Canon Austen called at her lodgings one November afternoon and found her with a heavy cold, crying and drinking port wine, in a third floor front, over a fire that smoked. He was comfortingly paternal, stroked her hair, spoke of Merlin and Vivien, and told her that protecting care, reverence and devotion, were ideals the younger generation of men were incapable of understanding. He spoke also of his own loneliness since his wife's death. Six weeks later they were married.

That was seven years before. Now he only went out on fine days, an insignificant white-bearded figure, leaning heavily on her arm. By degrees, neighbours stopped sending her invitations, as she nearly always refused them. She told me that he did not like to be left for more than half an hour. Two anæmic little girls spent nearly all their day in the kitchen with the one maid servant, as children worried him. By the time I knew him he had wandered mentally, but his manners were old-fashionedly courteous. In their rush-floored sitting room, in a beautifully modulated voice, he would speak of Dickens, Gladstone, Frith and Rossetti, whilst Cicely prepared his ovaltine before pouring out my tea. She had acquired the mechanically cheerful manner and tired eyes of a trained nurse who has been too long on a case. I do not know why she ever wanted to see me, except that she liked the chocolates I brought her.

That winter gave the village two subjects for conversation. Mr. Thompson's poaching spaniel was found shot in Horley Woods. Major Morris bought a Ford car. Mrs. Seton, with *suivez-moi* ribbons flying from a motor bonnet and enframing the determined red countenance that had raised mutiny in the hearts of many of her late husband's parishioners, was now

enabled by her brother to dash around, beating up missionary subscriptions and recruits for Mothers' Meetings, in outlying parts of the parish. She was sixty-four, and boasted that she had not spent a day upstairs, or had a fire lit in her bedroom, since her last confinement thirty years previously. She was without nerves, and considered them a new-fangled excuse for hysteria. Five summers before, she left Spaldingham, after a violent quarrel with Colonel Morris over his praying, seated, into his hat, instead of on his knees on the hassock provided at Divine service, as ordained by the Deity. She went to keep house for a son farming in Canada. Four months of "doing" the household laundry in a river three-quarters of a mile from her dwelling resulted in her reappearance in Spaldingham with the statement that England and a few hens were good enough for her. She made it up with her brother—as she said, it was something to find a man who, although his religious convictions had become somewhat unsettled owing to a military life, had enough sense of duty to the Almighty to attend Divine service regularly as an example to the lower classes. The road across the brickfields led to their house, small, damp, embedded in evergreens and smelling of the kennels behind. She lent me quarterlies sometimes, and in my more restless moments I liked her because she had travelled to Canada.

When December came, when the bodies of beasts slaughtered for foot-and-mouth disease swelled in the field beyond my bleak garden, and the gale hurled rain as though it were being sluiced from pails against the window glass, the pulse of life in the village throbbed imperceptibly. The nearest cottage held an old bedridden woman, who like King Charles was an unconscionable time in dying. Her impatient daughter-in-law was house proud, and the whitewashed attic was

chillily spotless, as was the perfectly goffered nightcap round the wizened face. With equal correctness a bible was placed on the crocheted cover of the night-table by the bed. I understood that she expected to be read to.

"Shall I read to you?"

"As you like, ma'am."

"What would you like me to read?"

"What you please, ma'am."

After a quarter of an hour, I laid the book down, and bidding adieu to the immobile figure under the grey patchwork quilt, went down the corkscrew stairs. They would have to get the coffin in by removing the casement window. Her daughter-in-law followed me to the gate. The shrill squeal of a pig from an adjacent slaughter house rent the air. Draggled hens scratched in the damp straw outside its door.

"Thank you, ma'am; there 'bain't no tellin' how long she mayn't last like this."

A theatrical wardrobe might have relieved one.

III. *Carchester.*

“**SHOULD** ADVISE you to lay in a stock of these hairpins whilst we hold them, Madam. Our manufacturers are no longer able to supply, as they are executing government barbed wire contracts.”—Richardson coming off duty in the V.A.B. hospital, powdering her pallid face in front of the stained deal dressing-table in the cloak room, and after giving details of a heavy night owing to Sargent Dalton’s final collapse from hemorrhage, admitting that the only thing about the prolongation of the fighting really worrying her was a “Daily Mail” paragraph: Owing to rice starch contained in it, further manufacture of face powder had been forbidden. Going home the morning before she had bought fourteen boxes of varying shades and qualities. “That and tea will see me through the rest of the war. I never was a heavy eater,” she remarked, examining a spot on her chin critically in front of the mottled glass.

In the kitchens, voluntary workers with their rationing books left in handbags in the cloak-room, obtained a comforting illusion of plenty from the handling of hospital supplies. Slabs of bleeding liver, rabbits, reddish purple, sacks of winter vegetables, blocks of margarine. The special diet sheet presented difficulties. Also the men would not touch “made-up” food. Four blue-suited convalescents came in after the doctor’s round, and peeled potatoes into buckets. At half-past ten the kitchen staff drank strong brewed tea from enamel mugs, and ate hunches of bread spread with dripping. In the mornings there was no time to toast it. Girls, with sleeves rolled above their floured forearms, giggled, pulled snapshots of the patients from their apron pockets, and showed them to one another whilst Mrs. Barton, the head cook, spoke at the tele-

phone. The most approachable ones had small woollen golliwogs, manufactured 'by men in the wards above, pinned to their white starched bibs.

A loose mouthed charwoman, with untidy hair and a soft unwieldy body, made excuses to enter the kitchen two or three times whilst the men were there, chaffing and laughing loudly with them each time she did so. The other workers, whatever step in the social scale they were drawn from, all considering themselves her superior, resented this, but were frigidly civil, for fear she would pretend that she had not the time to wash the kitchen implements required in a hurry. She drank her tea and ate her bread and dripping over the scullery sink, amid piles of dishes washed and unwashed, while the two-year-old child she was still nursing, played with grimed potatoes and turnips on the floor. Her husband was in France, in addition to the weekly grant from his pay, she got good money for her work at the hospital, and was living with a lance corporal from the infantry barracks. She was one of many who would regret the end of the war.

Lodging house keepers in Carchester got their share of loot from the collapse of civilisation. Every room, good, bad and indifferent could have been let half a dozen times over to distracted temporary officers, who trudged the city for hours, carrying their kit-bags, unable to find accommodation. They were overcharged, their government rations filched, hot water allowanced as though on active service. Complaints were met by the reply that if not satisfied they could go—the room could be let again before night—that the landlady herself objected to taking lodgers, but felt that she was “doing her bit” by wearing out herself and her furniture in making a home from home for military gentlemen.

The “temps” in many cases brought wives who had

provided themselves with copies of "Manners and Rules of Good Society," so as not to be at a disadvantage in the new social sphere in which they hoped to find themselves. The lady of a quite efficient middle-aged subaltern who had been a traveller for Warder's Whisky, sat in her lodgings from two till six, every afternoon throughout July and August, "in case any one called." When the major's wife under orders from her husband, eventually did so, she with difficulty prevented herself from replying "Damn'd damp," to her hostess's remark, "Mr. Kendal and myself consider the climate of Carchester excessively humid. Do not you?" The social leavening that the ferment of the war should have produced, failed, as did everything promised from it.

The montony of the fourth year of war exhausted all emotions capable of being played upon by government posters and newspaper specials; preoccupation with the scarcity of necessities supervened. Lady Darley, in chinchilla wrap and suède gloves, stated that she was tired. She was going home to lie down until lunch. She had been standing more than an hour in the sugar queue at Alden's—"Farmers demanded eight and six apiece for young rabbits in the market, and took them home again to give to their dogs, rather than sell them for less." Alden the grocer's was mobbed by a dingy crowd of customers from the Co-operative Stores, whose reserve stocks had run low, and whose entire plate glass front was given up to an exposition of tins of salmon and wreaths of immortelles under glass cases, evinced either a morbid humour, or unfortunate association of ideas, on the part of the window dresser.

The seal-like, red-faced proprietor at the Black Stag Hotel welcomed clients with an unpleasing familiarity heightened by whisky; here good meals were still obtainable at heavy prices, often without production of

ration tickets. No other hotel keeper in the city risked such a pre-war display of dressed meats on his side table. Members of the local food committee lunched there every day. Hospitality in private houses became an ordeal for entertainer and entertained when the poster, "Eat less bread," was displayed in every dining room, and a request was made that the guest's cutlet bone should be placed on a dish provided for that purpose, so that it might be further utilized by the household.

A difference in popular spirit. White-bearded old gentlemen in bath chairs no longer tore off their hats to wave them at khaki platoons marching off to billet. The substitution of the word "Windsor" for "Guelph" by the king, in the royal family tree, and the conversion of certain of his less important relatives from Anglo-German princelings to English aristocrats, awoke little national enthusiasm; though it was still possible to arouse irritation in an English railway carriage or drawing-room by remarking that George and his sons were praiseworthy examples of what could be done with full-blooded Germans after two or three generations of British training. To Carchester, war was no longer represented by tattered banners hanging in the half lights of its cathedral, but by emptying shop windows and overflowing hospitals. Hysteria amongst the women had reached its height when elderly Miss Jackson, a regular visitor at the Military Hospital, begged to be allowed to enter the mortuary so that she might kiss the bodies of three New Zealand soldiers she had never seen, "for their mothers' sake."

In travelling theatrical companies, boys of fifteen played juvenile lead to flamboyant leading ladies, whilst elderly gentlemen, scraggy and obese, some moving rheumatically and with cotton wool in their ears, swung canes and raised top hats in a dandy chorus.

Something had to be done to liven up things for men on leave. There were prostitutes in plenty, school girls with painted faces, middle-aged, respectable looking women whose husbands were on active service, hanging round the barrack gates all day, and making the pavements of Church Walk impassable after dark. In the Maternity Hospital a ward had been set apart for unmarried mothers. From time to time a child made its arrival there, whose skin had the appearance of half melted pink wax. The nurses disinfected their hands before and after touching it. Meetings were held in private houses at which rescue workers and clergy fought as to the desirability of forming proper organisations for helping young women to avoid the heaviest penalty of their sin. Commanding and medical officers raged against a pure-minded government which refused to allow the military authorities to interfere with women who were known to be contaminating batch after batch of newly joined recruits. At Sergeant Thompson's funeral, the chaplain addressed the mourners with diffidence, in spite of military lustre lent by the Union Jack wrapped round the coffin on the gun carriage, and the firing party under command of a subaltern with his tongue in his cheek.

Yet optimism existed. A halfpenny daily paper running a serial love story and economical cookery recipes, stated that it was winning the war for England. The feet of hundreds in Carchester moved to one-steps and fox trots night after night. As Reginald Davis, rich elderly bachelor, owner of the steel works, said: "One must make the best of the show. There's old Lawson Green, who's lost his two boys, down in the mouth, depressing other people, taking no interest in anything. As for me, I've never been in better health in my life, have made many pleasant new acquaintances I should not have met except for the war, and we've extended the works."

IV. Colonel Sir H. Brockbank.

PRESTWICK BROUGHT in the tumbler and a glass jug of barley water. He made up the fire and vanished.

Colonel Sir Henry Brockbank laid the late evening special on his knee, took off his eyeglasses and polished them. He moved to the writing table, and took out a large book bound in half leather.

Since leaving his regiment he kept accounts. He smoked a cigar at nine-thirty while he entered the day's expenditure under ten different headings. Items for clothes, wine and tobacco were heavy. But he under-tipped regularly and walked to save taxis and bus fares, even when tired. As the car consumed a great deal of petrol it was not used until 3 p.m.

He was careful only to know the right sort of man, and was acquainted with nearly all the members of his Club who counted. He disliked what he called a bounder as much as a woman without what he called a figure. Neither counting nor non-counting men came round after dinner to smoke with Sir Henry.

Many signed female photographs showed through an atmosphere hazy from his cigar, and the November fog which filtered through one window insufficiently hasped. The turkey carpet was thick, the curtains plush, the ample chairs of faintly aromatic leather. A sword hung above Chinese bronze distortions on the mantelpiece. Water colour sketches of Cashmere and four tarnished gilt frames enclosing dingier canvases, adorned the crimson walls. On a pembroke table lay a case of patience cards, Brigett's "Dry Fly Fishing," and a couple of library novels. Beneath the crisp freshness of that week's *Field* were folded some much creased magenta sheets entitled the *Sporting Times* or the *Pink 'Un*.

A large portrait of Lady Brockbank, with curled toupée, and figure moulded into hour-glass symmetry by the spoon busk corsets of the 80's, hung between the windows. It was in a bad light. He still possessed the original. Flatter and more faded, wrapped in a shawl and knitting, she sat in a wilderness of pink Aubusson carpet and gilt furniture above, called the drawing room. A clock chimed at nine twenty-five. Lady Brockbank coughed. Another clock chimed at nine-thirty. Lady Brockbank coughed. Clocks chimed at nine thirty-two and at nine thirty-four, and Lady Brockbank coughed. She troubled Sir Henry little except for a heavy half-yearly doctor's account, and by her asthmatical attacks at meals. She could not keep her servants, but the Mount Street address made it easy for her to replace them without undue delay. Prestwick she had tried often to dislodge. Prestwick found anything that had been mislaid, answered telephone calls with discretion, and clicked the door handle before entering the smoking room when ladies were in there. He was at that moment sipping a glass of '67 port in the basement.

In the smoking room Sir Henry propped his bald head on his hands. He could not account for three shillings and seven pence. His sunken gaze came to rest on a small metal plaque hanging by the fireplace:

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
And all sweet shapes and odours there,
In truth have never passed away;
'Tis we, 'tis ours that change; not they.

The lettering of the inscription surrounded a somewhat Botticellian female figure clothed in blue mediæval garments, and carrying an armful of lilies across a garden of green enamel; the whole scene was about eight inches long. Lady Bingham had bought this parting gift during the month preceding her operation for cancer.

Tears started in Sir Henry's faded blue eyes. She had ruled him for sixteen years. Incidents gained a sentimental value for him through the fact of their being past. During Lucilla's lifetime her daughter had always been a superfluous presence. Now there were fretful reproaches if the girl let more than a week pass without looking in to see him. She arrived after breakfast, as he was writing ambiguous notes to women acquaintances, or precise instructions to his stockbrokers. His quivering fingers would twist the bored young face to the light as he murmured, "so like, so like." There was no resemblance between mother and daughter. His coarse grey moustache scratched Phœbe's forehead. She disliked it—but she knew that he had remembered her in his will.

The hour hand of the clock passed ten. Sir Henry laid down his cigar. At length and with difficulty he accounted for two shillings and fourpence of the three and seven. He crossed to the hearth and spread out his hands to catch the little heat still rising from its cinders. His well cut clothes hung loosely on a tall round-shouldered body. The bald head, hooked nose with pince-nez, and shaggy moustache, retained few traces of the smart military appearance that had originally attracted Lady Bingham at Ranelagh.

He stared at the plaque until it became an opalescent blur. It conveyed in some way more poignant reminiscences than did the large Lafayette portrait of a pale statuesque beauty heightened by court train, plumes and veil, standing on the lacquer cabinet which they had chosen together. Sixteen years earlier he had considered facing open scandal on account of Lucilla. He had weighed the stimulus of her ironical conversations as against the legs of demi-mondaines, and eventually compromised. Until her last illness, when the Bingham were in town, he called almost daily at her home,

to dilate on his engagements, his investments, worries caused by his wife or her relatives, or because he had not received an invitation to a function that "mattered." Until the age of fifty he had been a good diner-out, quick to comment on the ridiculous in his friends. After that trifling annoyances gained gradually in importance, until he could consider little else. But if the band crashed loudly enough at Sunday afternoon Albert Hall concerts, he still said, "Fine piece that," and whilst preferring Musical Comedy to Drama, would speak of a sentimental play as "a pretty play." A few people still looked at Lucilla.

Sound of feet approached the window, passed and died away. Embers were fading into a heap of fluffy ashes. "Must get a thicker set of vests to-morrow." Had she ever loved him really? There had been a time at any rate when she had been more eager for his kisses than for his gifts. Why had she refused to see him during her last few weeks? She had asked continually for the common-place husband who had bored her throughout her married life. Sir Henry had never made a mistake when trusting to her judgment.

"Possibly the morphia—" He had invariably been careful of his health. Why should he stay in town now that Lucilla had gone? No other woman mattered sufficiently. Since the war there had been fewer social functions congenial to a man of his age, and he tired easily. His father had lived at Bournemouth until well past his ninety-third birthday. There was a good club there, and many naval and military residents who had been knighted or decorated on retirement.

He replaced the account book in its drawer, turned the key in the lock, and drained his tumbler of barley water. The foggy hall struck chill after the warmth of the smoking room. He could not remember a worse November. Darkness crept up through the house behind

him, enveloping his stooping figure, as on landing after landing, ascending, he switched off the electric light. But Prestwick would never consent to leave London. Prestwick was the only person left he could rely on.

